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CHAPTER

6

RIGHT AND WRONG USES OF MODERN MEDICINES

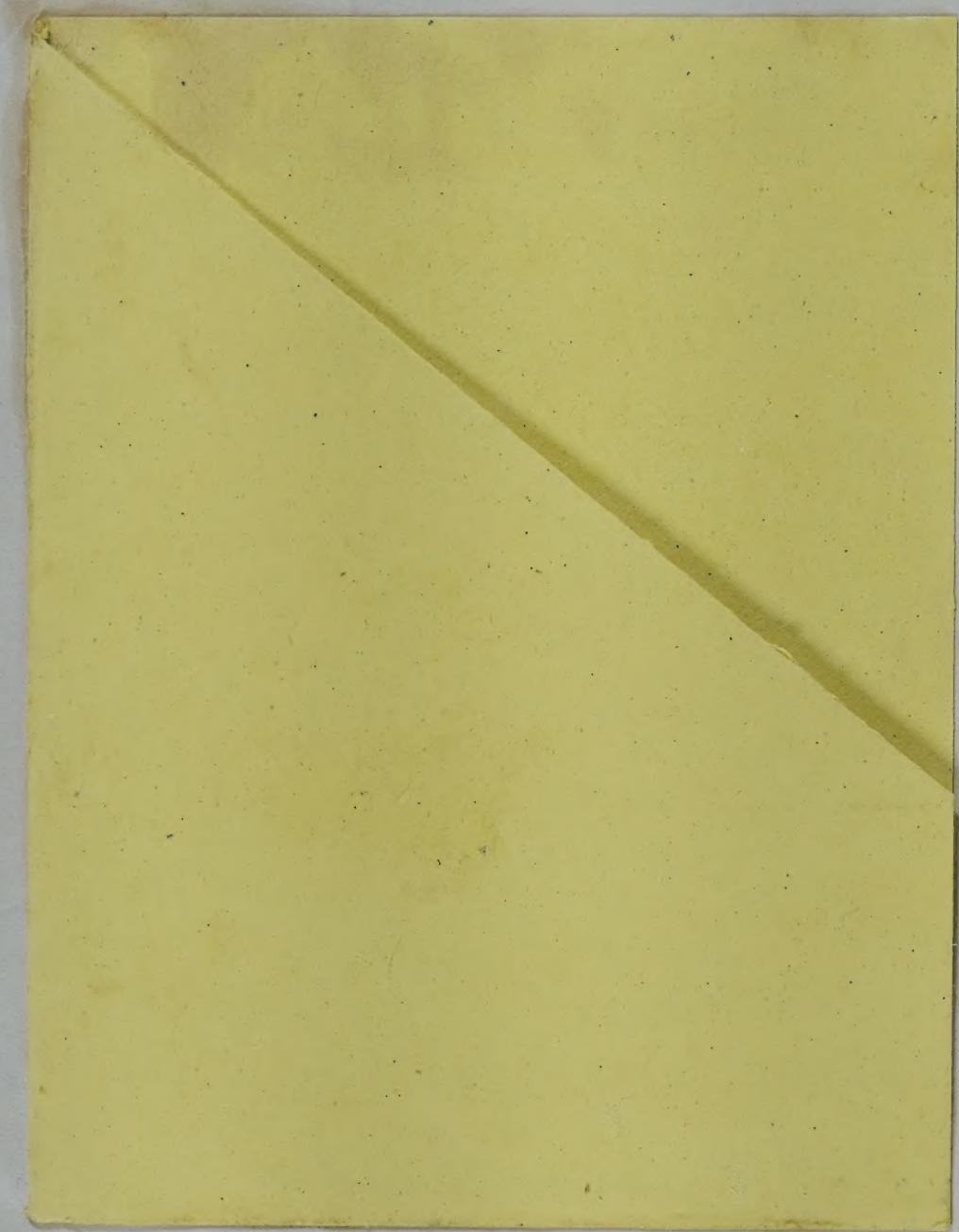
This is a reprint from

Where There Is No Doctor

(Indian adaptation)

published by the

Voluntary Health Association of India
C-14 Community Centre
Safdarjung Development Area
New Delhi 110016



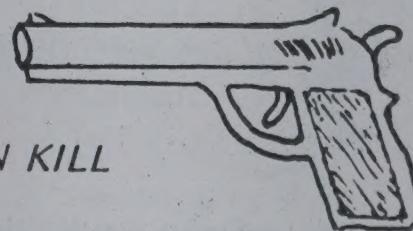
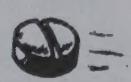
RIGHT AND WRONG USES OF MODERN MEDICINES

Some medicines sold in pharmacies or village stores can be very useful. Others are of no value. Also, people sometimes use the best medicines in the wrong way, so that they do more harm than good. **To be helpful, medicine must be used correctly.**

Many people, including most doctors and health workers, prescribe far more medicines than are needed—and by so doing cause much needless sickness and death.

There is some danger in the use of any medicine.

Some medicines are much more dangerous than others. Unfortunately, people sometimes use very dangerous medicines for mild sicknesses. (I have seen a baby die because his mother gave him a dangerous medicine, chloramphenicol, for a cold.) **Never use a dangerous medicine for a mild illness.**



REMEMBER: MEDICINES CAN KILL

Guidelines for the use of medicine:

1. Use medicines only when necessary.
2. Know the correct use and precautions for any medicine you use (see the GREEN PAGES).
3. Be sure to use the right dose.
4. If the medicine does not help, or causes problems, stop using it.
5. When in doubt, seek the advice of a health worker.
6. **Always check the expiry date** (last date before which to use) of the medicine. If the medicine is given after this date, it may do more harm than good.

Note: Some health workers and many doctors give medicines when none is needed, often because they think patients expect medicine and will not be satisfied unless they get some. Tell your doctor or health worker you only want

medicine if it is definitely needed. This will save you money and be safer for your health.

**Only use a medicine when you are sure it is needed
and when you are sure how to use it.**

THE MOST DANGEROUS MISUSE OF MEDICINE

Here is a list of the most common and dangerous errors people make in using modern medicines. The improper use of the following medicines causes many deaths each year. BE CAREFUL!

1. Chloramphenicol (*Chloromycetin*) (p. 401)



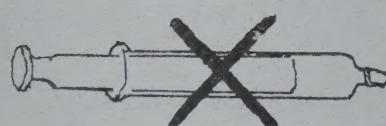
The popular use of this medicine for simple diarrhea and other mild sicknesses is extremely unfortunate, because it is so risky. Use chloramphenicol only for very severe illnesses, like typhoid (see p. 229). Never give it to newborn infants.

2. Oxytocin (*Pitocin*), Pituitrin, and Ergonovine (*Ergotrate*) (p. 424)



Unfortunately, some midwives use these medicines to speed up childbirth or 'give strength' to the mother in labor. This practice is very dangerous. It can kill the mother or the child. Use these medicines **only** to control bleeding **after** the child is born (see p. 312).

3. Injections of any medicine



The common belief that injections are usually better than medicine taken by mouth is **not** true. Many times medicines taken by mouth work as well as or better than injections. Also, **most medicine is more dangerous injected than when taken by mouth**. Use of injections should be **very limited** (read Chapter 9 carefully).

4. Penicillin

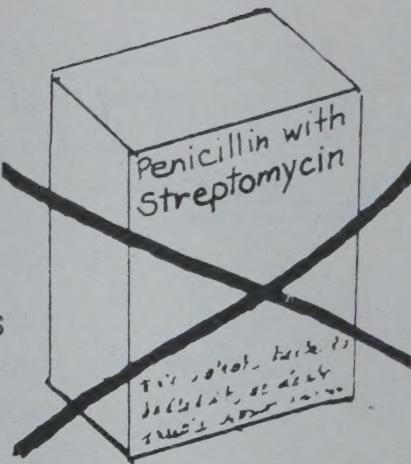
Penicillin works against only certain types of infections. Frequent use of penicillin for sprains, bruises, or any pain or fever is a great mistake. As a general rule, injuries that do not break the skin, even if they make large bruises, have no danger of infection; they do not need to be treated with penicillin or any other antibiotic. Penicillin ointment or powder used on the skin can make the person 'sensitive to penicillin.'

Penicillin is dangerous for some people. Before using it, know its risks and precautions you must take (see p. 70).

5. Injections of penicillin with streptomycin (p. 400).

There are many familiar brands names.

These medicines are used too much and often for the wrong reason. They should not be used for colds for two reasons



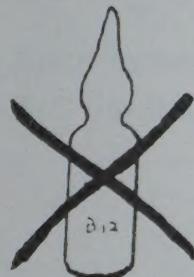
- 1a. They do not work against colds and flu.
- 1b. They can cause serious problems, sometimes deafness or death.

2. Give streptomycin for treatment of tuberculosis only.

If you give it for any other disease, the person may become resistant to streptomycin, and then will have to take more expensive medicines to cure tuberculosis.

Do not give this medicine for any other disease.

6. Vitamin B₁₂ and liver extract (p. 425)



These medicines do not help anemia or 'weakness' except in rare cases. Also, they have certain risks when injected. They should only be used when a health worker has prescribed them **after testing the blood**. In nearly every case of anemia, iron pills will do more good (see p. 147).

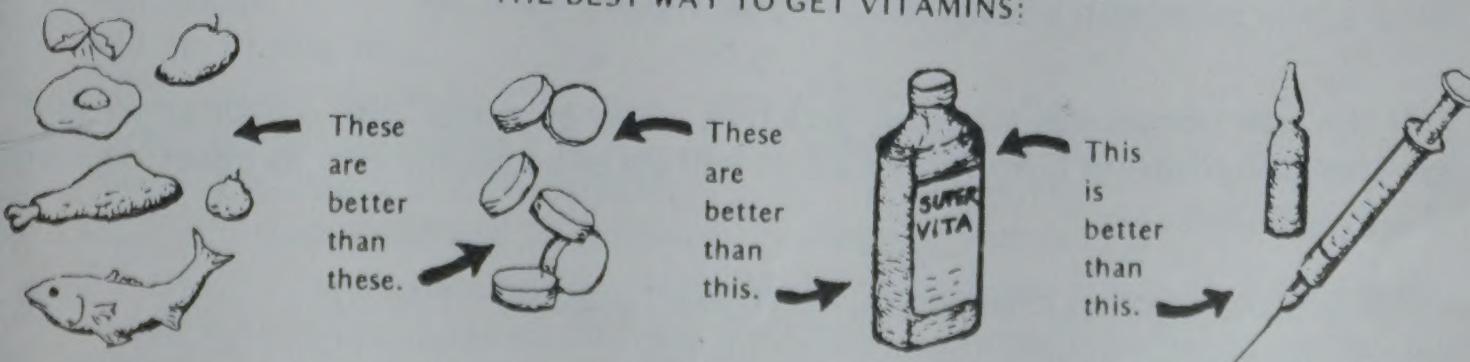
7. Other vitamins (p. 424)

As a general rule, **DO NOT INJECT VITAMINS**. Injections are more dangerous, more expensive, and usually no more effective than pills.

Unfortunately, many people waste their money on syrups, tonics, and 'elixirs' that contain vitamins. Many lack the most important vitamins (see p. 139'). But even when they contain them, it is wiser to buy more and better food. Body-building and protective foods like beans, vegetables, fruits, eggs, and meat, are rich in vitamins and other nutrients (see p. 129 -131). Giving a thin, weak person good food more often will usually help him far more than giving him vitamin and mineral supplements.

A person who eats well does not need extra vitamins.

THE BEST WAY TO GET VITAMINS:



For more information about vitamins, when they are necessary, and the foods that have them, read Chapter 11, especially pages 129 and 138

8. Calcium



Injecting calcium into a vein can be extremely dangerous. It can quickly kill someone if not injected **very slowly**. Injecting calcium into the buttocks sometimes causes very serious abscesses or infections.

Never inject calcium without first seeking medical advice!

Note: In countries where people eat a lot of corn or other foods prepared with lime, it is foolish to use calcium injections or tonics (as is often done to 'give strength' or 'help children grow'). The body gets all the calcium it needs from the lime.

9. 'Feeding' through the veins (Intravenous or 'I.V.' solutions)

In some areas, persons who are anemic or very weak spend their last **paise**, to have a liter of I.V. solution put into their veins. They believe that this will make them stronger or their blood richer. But they are wrong!

Intravenous solution is nothing more than pure water with some salt or sugar in it. It gives less energy than a large candy bar and makes the blood thinner, not richer. It does not help anemia or make the weak stronger.

Also when a person who is not well trained puts the I.V. solution into a vein, there is danger of an infection entering the blood. This can kill the sick person.

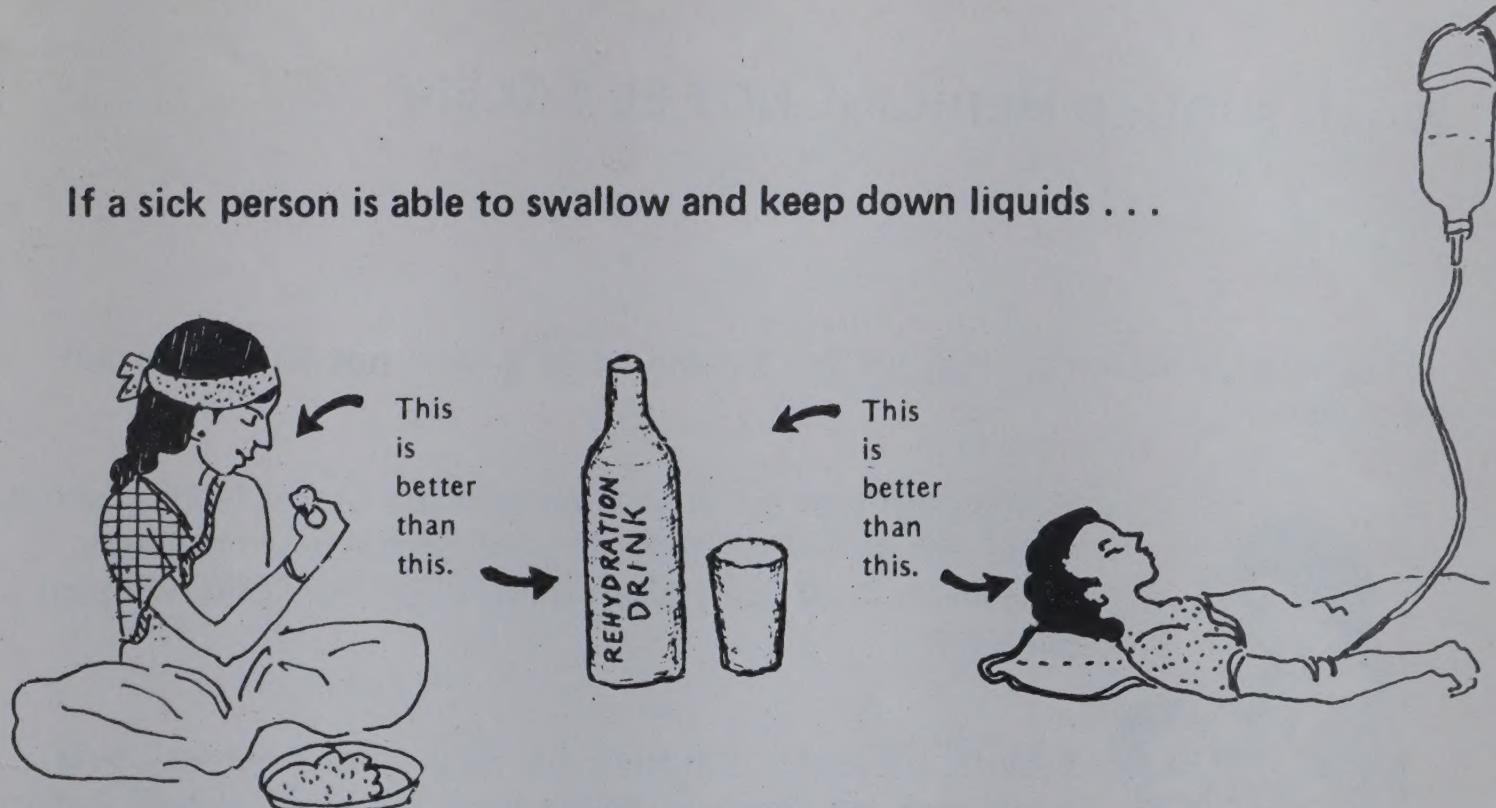
Intravenous solution should be used only when a person can take nothing by mouth, or when he is badly dehydrated (see p. 183).

Only a trained health worker should give these solutions.

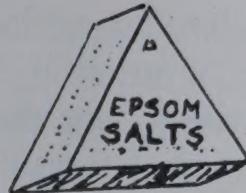
If the sick person can swallow, give him a liter of water with a little sugar and salt (see Rehydration Drink, p. 182). It will do as much for him as injecting a liter of I.V. solution.

For people who are able to eat, nutritious foods do more to strengthen them than any type of I.V. fluid.

If a sick person is able to swallow and keep down liquids . . .



10. Laxatives and Purges (p. 417)



It is always dangerous to give a laxative or purge to a baby or to anyone who is very weak, dehydrated, or has severe pain in his belly. Unfortunately, people often believe that purges bring back health or clean the bad things out of the body. In Chapter 1 it is explained that **purges or strong laxatives nearly always do more harm than good.**

To learn the correct uses of laxatives and enemas, see p. 21.

WHAT TO EAT WHEN TAKING MEDICINES

Many people believe that they should avoid eating certain foods like brinjal, tomato, curds, oranges, guavas, eggs, meat and cooking oil when they take any medicine. They think all medicines will do harm if they are taken with these foods. This is not true! No medicines causes harm just because it is taken with these foods.

But in case of some illnesses, certain foods can make the illness more severe, because the body cannot digest these foods:

diabetes..... see p. 149

heart problems..... see p. 371

high blood pressure..... see p. 148

gall bladder problems..... see p. 375

stomach ulcers and heart burn..... see p. 150

urinary tract infection in children..... see p. 357

Certain foods can cause serious damage in these illnesses, whether or not any medicine is being taken. Certain medicines will cause bad reactions if a person takes alcohol (see metronidazole, page 407)

WHEN SHOULD MEDICINE NOT BE TAKEN?

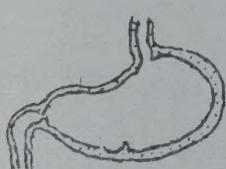
There are situations when, without a doubt, it is best **not** to use certain medicines:



1. Pregnant women or women who are breast feeding should avoid all medicines that are not absolutely necessary. (However, they can take vitamins or iron pills without danger.)



2. With newborn children, be very careful when using medicines. Whenever possible look for medical help before giving them any type of medicine. Be sure not to give too much.

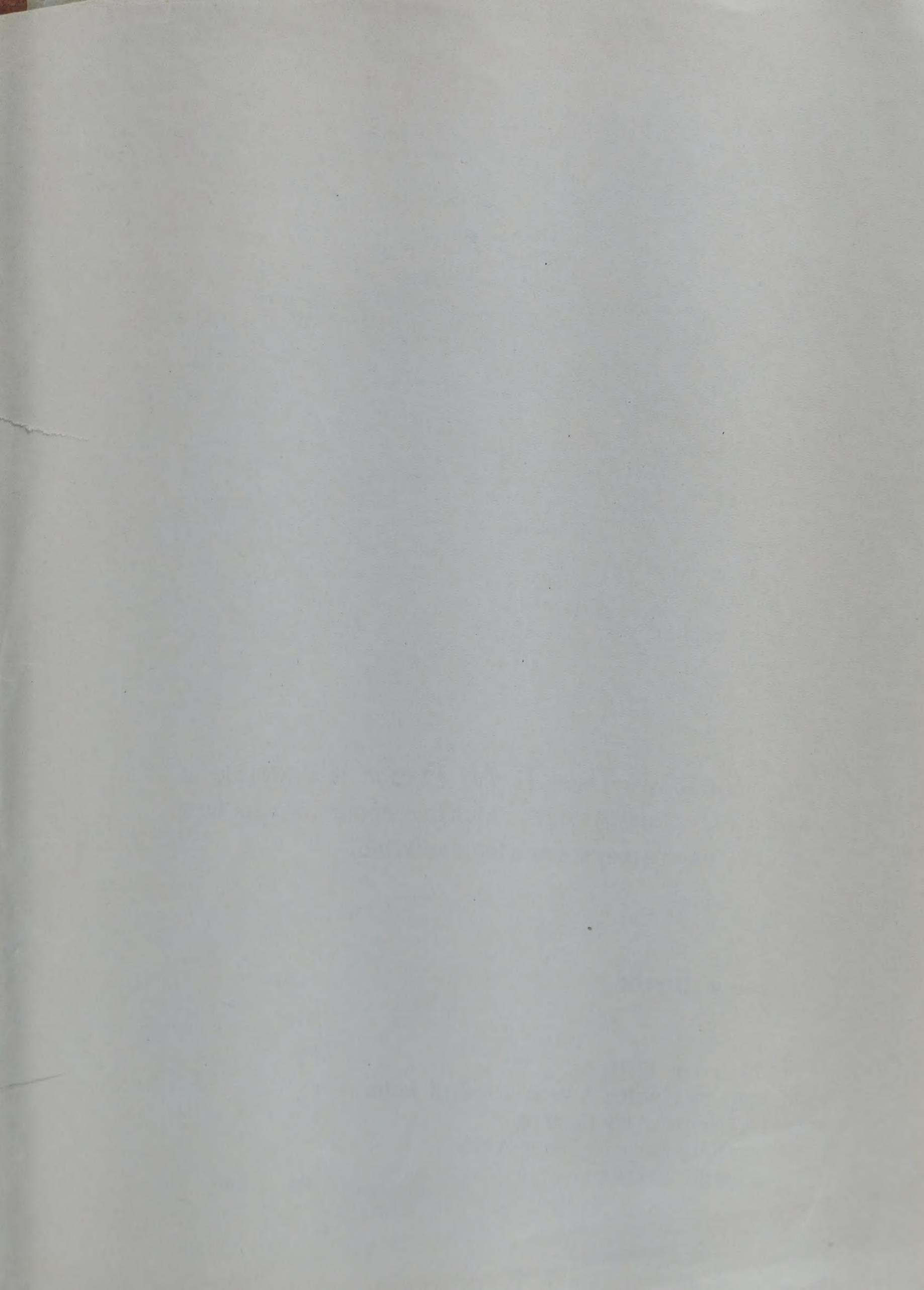


3. A person who has ever had any sort of allergic reaction—hives, itching, etc.—after taking penicillin, ampicillin, a sulfonamide, or other medicines, **should never use that medicine again for the rest of his life** because it would be dangerous (see Dangerous reactions from injections of certain medicines, p. 83).

4. Persons who have ulcers or heartburn should avoid medicines that contain aspirin.

5. There are specific medicines that are harmful or dangerous to take when you have certain illnesses. For example, persons with hepatitis should not be treated with antibiotics or other strong medicines, because their liver is damaged, and the medicines are more likely to poison the body (see p. 210).

6. Persons who are dehydrated or have disease of the kidneys should be especially careful with medicines they take. Do not give more than one dose of a medicine that could poison the body unless (or until) the person is urinating normally. For example, if a child has high fever and is dehydrated (see p. 88), do not give him more than one dose of aspirin until he begins to urinate. **Never give sulfa to a person who is dehydrated.**



The book *Where There Is No Doctor* is available at Rs 29/- plus postage. Multiple copies of reprints of various chapters are also available.

Please write to:

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Rs. 2.50